

## **Professional Development**

### *How to Showcase Your Student Teaching Abroad Experience Professionally*

#### Tips for Constructing a Résumé

##### ***What should I include in each section?***

- Education
  - Line 1: Include the full name of your degree, specialization, any honors with which you graduated, and the month/year you graduated
  - Line 2: Include the full name of your university, and the city/state where it is located
  - Line 3: GPA. This is optional, as it might be more pertinent to some jobs than others. If you include it, include it in the context of the GPA scale, which is usually 4.00.
  - If you have multiple degrees, list the one you received most recently first, and work backwards chronologically from there.
- Work Experience
  - The first thing you should list is your North Carolina Student Teaching Experience.
  - Line 1: Job Title (Student Teacher)
  - Line 2: Name of Cooperating School, City/State of Cooperating School, Dates taught there
  - Next, give two or three bullet points detailing what you did during this experience. Were you in charge of anything specific? What were your duties? What did you accomplish?
  - For your other work experiences, list them starting from most recent to least recent.
  - Jobs, internships, and other professional experiences should be listed in this section.
- International Experience
  - This section will be important for showcasing your Student Teaching Abroad Experience! Your Student Teaching Abroad experience should be the first thing listed in this section (as it is not only the most recent, but also the most pertinent to the job you're trying to secure).
  - Remember, this experience is significant for your résumé because it sets you apart professionally from other job candidates. So, take advantage of using this section to showcase how this experience made you a better teacher and a more appealing job candidate. What did you do while you were overseas? What did you learn and how can you apply that to your classroom here in NC? What about this experience really sets you apart from other teachers? You should still answer these questions in the context of a descriptive responsibility/experience/accomplishment, just remember that these are the sorts of questions you should keep in mind as you develop the descriptive bullet points for this experience.
  - Notice at the top of the résumé sample is a space to include your student teaching abroad blog. Including a link to your blog is a way to give your interviewer a more holistic picture of your time overseas and how it sets you apart professionally. If you choose to include this, MAKE SURE to go back through your blog and polish it up. Some things to consider are:
    - Make sure you're spelling and grammar are correct throughout your blog. Remember, your interviewer will be referencing this as a professional resource, and so it should appear as such.
    - Be mindful of the pictures you have posted on your blog. For example, pictures of you (or anyone) drinking alcohol, smoking, or participating in other similar activities should be removed. A good rule of thumb: if you wouldn't share a certain picture/story with your employer/grandmother/etc., it is probably not appropriate for a professional blog.
    - Be mindful of any religiously driven material you might have on your blog, especially if you plan to apply for jobs in the public school system.
    - Remove any negative comments about peers or other people you have in your blog. These could reflect to an employer that you don't work well with others or that you might be a hindrance to staff morale rather than a help. Discussing frustrating experiences within the

- culture is fine as long as you also demonstrate learning/reflection with it, but you want to avoid a venting rant.
  - Go through your blog with a fine-toothed comb and read it from the perspective of a hiring school principal. If you have any question about a certain picture/item in your blog, you're probably better off removing it.
  - Something to INCLUDE or even go back and add to your blog would be connections you made with your NC school placement, global awareness responses, more cultural aspects; essentially, show how this experience improved you as a teacher and how you can apply your intercultural lessons in a classroom environment.
  - If you would like an objective review of your blog, contact Megan to review it for you and give you suggestions for improvements!
- Involvement
    - This is a place to highlight any significant leadership positions you might have held. You may also include volunteer positions in this section if you feel they will help paint a picture of the skills or experiences you will be able to apply to the job for which you are applying. Remember, everything on your résumé should contribute to showcasing what you have to offer to your potential employer, to the job itself, and to the people you will be serving in that job (in this case, your students).
  - Awards & Honors
    - This is a place to list awards or honors you have received. Academic honors and awards received from clubs/previous jobs/conferences/etc. are appropriate to include here. While it would be helpful if these awards are in some way relevant to the job for which you are applying, it is alright if they are unrelated, so long as they indicate that you excelled in something. This shows employers that you have achieved excellence in the past, and are likely to do so again in the future.

You may also include other sections, such as a "Special Skills" section if you feel that these are important to highlight to your potential employer. For example, if you feel you developed usable language skills while you were overseas, you could list some level of fluency in that language under special skills. Other special skills include proficiency in certain computer programs, etc.

### ***General Tips***

- Always put your most recent experiences at the top of each section (reverse chronological order).
- When you begin a sentence on your résumé (i.e., the bullet points describing a position you held or an experience you had), begin your sentence with a strong action verb. Using active rather than passive voice is important. For example, instead of saying "In charge of grading papers and exams," you could say "Evaluated students by grading papers and administering exams" or simply just "Graded papers and administered exams." Some strong words to begin these descriptions on your résumé are: spearheaded, conducted, assembled, directed, supervised, facilitated, executed, researched, created, represented, provided, etc.
- When possible, use numbers to describe what you did; employers like to see quantifiable and measurable results of your responsibilities and accomplishments. For example, instead of saying "Developed curriculum for fifth grade classes," you could write "Developed curriculum for three fifth-grade classes." This gives your interviewer a more complete picture of your exact responsibilities for that job or position.
- Don't overstate your position or involvement in any part of your résumé. Interviewers often call previous employers to inquire about job candidates, and your previous employer will give them an accurate picture of your previous responsibilities. You will also be asked to expand upon parts of your résumé in an interview, and you need to be able to do so honestly; if you're exaggerating, it might be more obvious than you think.
- Make sure the formatting in your résumé is CONSISTENT! If you bold or italicize one section title, bold them all; make sure your bullet points are all aligned with each other. Leave at least 1/2 inch

- margin (.8-1 inch is ideal) with 10-12 point font, and don't clutter your résumé too much, keep it as simple at first glance as possible. Interviewers spend an average of 30 seconds looking at your résumé before they move on to the next one; a cluttered résumé is more likely to be passed over for a more concise and quickly readable résumé. On the same note, make absolutely sure that there are NO spelling or grammar mistakes in your résumé; careless mistakes will usually automatically disqualify you in the mind of a potential employer.\*
- Bullet points should not exceed 2-3 lines. Do not type paragraphs; bullet points are meant to give a quick description of an important aspect of your job/experience, NOT a detailed overview of every aspect of that job/experience.
- Think about the skills/experiences/job descriptions that you are listing, and try to frame them in such a way that an employer can see that your skills are transferrable to the job for which you are applying. They want to see that what you're able to do (reflected in what you've already done) will benefit them as an employer.
- You will likely reach a point in constructing your résumé where you need to cut certain things out in the interest of space. When doing this, ask yourself, "Does this item represent high value/interest information to the reader?"\*
- Print your résumé on résumé-quality paper (this is heavier/thicker, higher quality paper). Never hand an employer your résumé printed on plain computer paper.
- Try not to exceed one page for your résumé.
- Don't use "I" or pronouns, write in the third person, or use inconsistent verb tenses. Use the same font type throughout your whole résumé.\*

### **Tips for Constructing a Cover Letter**

- Like your résumé, your cover letter should include strong action verbs and be written in active, not passive voice.
- Your cover letter should only be one page. It should have introductory/conclusory paragraphs, and anywhere from 2-4 paragraphs in the body of the letter.
- Do not use a blanket cover letter; these are by nature not sharply targeted to the organization to which you are applying, and are therefore more ineffective. Tailor each cover letter to each employer. Use the company/organization/s name in the first paragraph if possible, and in a few more places throughout your letter to indicate that it was specifically written for them.
- Before writing your cover letter, carefully examine the job requirements for the job to which you are applying. Then, make a list of your top 6-10 skills/experiences/credentials/etc. that most closely match the listed job requirements. This way, you will have a list of well-thought out qualifications that match the job description for you to include in your cover letter as you write it.\*\*
- Group your qualifications into a few groups that make sense to talk about together (these will be your paragraphs). There should be about 3-4 items per paragraph, so the number of qualifications you listed will determine how many paragraphs you have. Include these grouped qualifications in the order that they make sense in your letter (i.e., they do not necessarily need to appear in a particular order, so long as they flow well within your letter).\*\*
- Try to make sure that the credentials that are most significant for your employer are somewhat distributed through your letter; if you include them all at the beginning, they will lose interest towards the end... and even worse, if you include them all at the end, they might lose interest before they even read them.
- To include your Student Teaching Abroad Experience:
  - This could be an entire paragraph in your cover letter, depending on how much you would like to highlight it. Talking about it in your cover letter is a chance to expand a little more on what you included in your résumé.
  - Think of your Student Teaching Abroad experience through the lens of a hiring principal, and ask yourself questions that they might ask. For example, what did you do while you were student teaching abroad, and how does that make you a better teacher for a class of NC students? What lessons did you learn overseas that you can implement both in the material you teach your students

- and in the classroom environment itself? What was the point of this experience, and why is your experience invaluable to your potential employer?
- Be careful to frame your cover letter in such a way that it tells the reader how you will benefit their school/company/etc. if they hire you, and what you can contribute to them and to the job, instead of what you think you can get from the job. (This should also be true of your résumé where applicable, and in your interview as well). Also, as in your résumé, be mindful that employers are looking for transferrable skills. Make sure that you also somehow indicate (even if indirectly) that the skills you have are transferrable to the job for which you are applying.
- Remember, less is usually more. Be thorough, but do so as concisely as possible.
- Modesty has no place in a cover letter- this is your chance to tell your potential employer why you are a better candidate than all the rest. Describing your skills and qualifications does not mean you have to be arrogant or cocky, rather it means communicating your value as an employee with confidence and assurance that you could not only do the job, but do it well and excel in it.
- Your cover letter should also be printed on résumé-quality paper.

### **Tips for Interviewing**

#### ***Before the Interview***

- Dress business professional. For men, this is a suit and tie, for women, this can also mean a suit or a very professional skirt, blouse, and shoes with pantyhose.
- Have your résumés and cover letters printed on résumé paper, and keep them inside something that will protect them from being bent or damaged (you want them to be crisp and clean when you hand them to your interviewers). Print several of each, so that you will have enough to hand to each person interviewing you (always have extra copies- even if you think only one person is interviewing you, oftentimes more than one interviewer will show up!).
- Have an “elevator pitch” about your Student Teaching Abroad experience prepared. What’s an “elevator pitch”? Imagine you’re on an elevator, and your ideal employer steps onto the elevator with you. You’re on the first floor, and your employer has pushed the button for the tenth floor- you have one minute to tell them why this experience was valuable and how it makes you the perfect candidate for the job! Essentially, an “elevator pitch” is a brief, concise description of what you did, why it’s important, and how it makes you a better candidate than everyone else. Have an “elevator pitch” prepared for your Student Teaching Abroad experience (and practice it a few times!) so that you can quickly and clearly explain it to your interviewer it’s significance while showing them that it sets you apart from the rest.
- Make sure you know where the location of your interview is and how long it takes to get there. Consider what time of day you will be traveling as well (so as to avoid traffic, etc.).
- Arrive to your interview 10 minutes early.

#### ***During the Interview***

- Introduce yourself to your interviewer(s), firmly shake their hands.
- Hand each interviewer a hard copy of your résumé, printed on résumé quality paper.
- Make eye contact with interviewers both while they are asking questions and as you are answering them.
- Elaborate as much as you can on the questions the interviewer asks. Simple “yes” or “no” answers aren’t particularly useful for them to understand you as a job candidate. If “yes” or “no” is your answer to a question, take a moment to explain why you answered “yes” or “no.” For example, if the interviewer asks if you believe that your Student Teaching Abroad experience sets you apart from other candidates, you could answer, “Yes, it definitely sets me apart because...” Their questions are a time for you to sell yourself as a job candidate, so take advantage of this time!

- With the last point in mind, you also want to be careful not to be TOO wordy in your answers. Answer the question fully and communicate your ideas clearly, but be careful not to talk for so long that the interviewers begin to lose interest in what you are saying. Being thorough does not mean you cannot be concise!
- Your Student Teaching Abroad experience will likely come up in an interview since it is a professional experience that your employer is not likely to have seen before. This is a chance for you to give your “elevator pitch” (discussed above), expand on their questions, and convince your interviewer that this experience sets you a cut above other applicants. If you included your blog link on your résumé, then this would also be a great time to refer your interviewer to that link for a more complete picture of your experiences overseas.
- Have questions prepared for your interviewer to ask them at the end, this shows you are invested in the job. Often an interviewer will ask you if you have any questions, and you don’t want to have to answer “no,” this shows a lack of interest in the job.
- When the interview is over, shake each interviewer’s hand again and thank them for their time.

### ***After the Interview***

- Send some form of “thank you” to thank your interviewer for taking the time out of their busy schedule to consider you for the job. Emails are acceptable, but a hand-written thank you note is ideal.
- If the interviewer has given you a time frame within which they will respond, try to avoid asking if they’ve come to a decision before that time. If they have not notified you about whether you’ve been hired by the time they said they would, wait 24 hours before contacting them about it.
- If you are not hired for the job, it is appropriate to ask the interviewer what you could have improved upon in your interview or on your résumé. Employers are usually happy to give constructive criticism, and this will help you to improve your interview skills or correct your résumé for next time!

### **What are Wake County Principals looking for in teachers?**

*When asked what they look for when hiring a teacher, wake county principals offered the following answers:*

- Principal #1: Differentiation and assessment skills. Ability to balance state expectations, standardized testing, and inquiry-based learning.
- Principal #2: Persistence, kindness, intelligence, good communication skills, teamwork, and subject area skills.
- Principal #3: Quality of their undergraduate educational institution, experience, extroversion, ability to communicate.
- Principal #4: Life experience, diverse ethnicity, knowledge of subject area.
- Principal #5: A good person, someone who’s coming into the field of education for the right reasons, people who have family members who are teachers, good communication skills, strong academics.

### **Study Abroad Skills**

*As you construct your résumé, cover letter, and prepare for interviews, keep these skills learned from your study abroad experiences in mind:*

- Achieve goals through many obstacles
- Handle stress
- Adapt to new environments
- Learn through listening and observing
- Thrive in an environment with adverse conditions
- Empathize with language learners

- Take initiatives and risks
- Communicate despite barriers
- Accept responsibility
- Organize logistics
- Ability to understand another culture
- Self-reliance
- Appreciation of diversity
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Open-mindedness
- Self-confidence
- Inquisitiveness
- Independence
- Knowledge of self (own cultural beliefs, strengths, weaknesses, etc.)

Sources:

- \* Mary E. Hayward, M.Ed. 1996, revised with Mary Ellen Liseno, MA, 2010.
- \*\* Mary E. Hayward, M.Ed. 1997, revised 2010.